

Olsen twins, 10, are raking in millions by entertaining children

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HOLLYWOOD — Quick: After Disney, what is the most popular name in kids' home entertainment these days? Sesame Street? Barney?

Try Olsen.

With a series of low-budget videocassettes that have raked in \$77 million in sales, 10-year-old twins Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen have taken the No. 1 spot in the nonanimated children's video market. In the process, the sisters, who cut their teeth on the hit ABC television sitcom "Full House," have become heroes to the under-12 set and millionaires to boot.

Thanks to skillful maneuvering by their parents, a careful master plan by an ambitious lawyer-manager, and a dearth of movies and videos for young girls, the sisters now sit atop an entertainment empire. Their credits include an eight-season run

on network TV, three made-for-TV movies, 14 shows made specifically for home video, and a feature film.

"When the girls left the TV show, everybody said their careers were over," said Robert Thorne, 42, the Hollywood lawyer who has carefully orchestrated Mary-Kate and Ashley's acting careers and business dealings since they were four. Instead, he says, "we decided it was time they could step out."

The girls aren't taking baby steps, either. Dualstar Entertainment Group Inc., the twins' Los Angeles holding company, now encompasses film and TV production, records, publications and interactive divisions.

Their two video series, "The Adventures of Mary-Kate and Ashley" and "You're Invited to Mary-Kate and Ash-

ley's," have sold more than six million units, and now Scholastic Inc. is distributing a line of 14 children's books based on the shows.

The video of their first feature film, "It Takes Two," sold 3.2 million copies, bringing in \$36 million in revenue to distributor Warner Bros., a unit of Time Warner Inc. Two Olsen music CDs have each sold more than 350,000 copies, and 500,000 copies of their music video have flown off the shelves.

In Las Vegas, thousands of children wait in line while Mary-Kate and Ashley sign autographs from inside an air-conditioned bubble; in New York, a line wraps around FAO Schwarz so kids can spend a few seconds single-filing past the girls and waving while parents snap pictures; at Sea World in San Diego, Mary-Kate and Ash-

ley pack a stadium usually reserved for Shamu the Whale.

What's their secret? "They're no Shirley Temple," said Andy Tennant, who directed the twins in "It Takes Two," produced by Rysher Entertainment. "They don't have exquisite talent. What they have is a lot of charm and a huge marketing campaign. That's what sells these days."

For girls who grew up watching the twins on "Full House," Mary-Kate and Ashley are cute, likable role models who sing, dance and throw cool slumber parties.

"I like the things they do," said Clea Litekwa, who had a slumber party of her own — complete with Olsen videos — for her ninth birthday. She has memorized all the songs on the twins' music videocassette, "Our First Video," which has been

on the bestseller charts for the past three years.

"There is nobody competing with them," said Arnold Holland, chief executive of Lightyear Entertainment, an independent video and recording label in New York. "Most TV properties are either aimed at boys or families. It's rare that there are any girl-oriented properties."

In the lucrative home-video market, the Olsens' parents and Thorne have hit upon a sure-fire formula. For "The Adventures of Mary-Kate and Ashley," the girls play two dimpled detectives whose agency motto is "will solve any crime by dinner time."

The story lines are extremely simple: the hunt for Dad's missing "secret computer disk" during a family Caribbean cruise, or the search for something spooky in an amusement park that is scaring customers away from the fun house.

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